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RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000521

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SUBJECT: Police Disperse Women's Protest with Tear Gas and Batons;
Anti-Referendum Groups Join Forces

Ref: a) Niamey 00504, b) Niamey 00503

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11. Summary: Security forces forcibly dispersed women demonstrating in Niamey on July 15 in support of the recently dismissed Constitutional Court and its president, using batons and tear gas to end a four-hour rally. Opposition groups have formed yet another coalition, with calls to "actively boycott" the August 4 referendum for a new constitution, and promises to "intensify" protest efforts. Finally, the judges union called for the reinstatement of the Constitutional Court and respect for judicial decisions. All three called on the international community to support the restoration of democracy in Niger. End summary.

FNIS Forcibly Disperse Women's Protest in Support of Court

12. On July 15, dozens of women supporters of the Front for the Defense of Democracy (FDD) marched and then assembled near the Constitutional Court in Niamey to hold a sit-in in support of the ousted Constitutional Court and its former president, Mrs. Salifou Fatima Bazeye. After roughly four hours of protest, the Niger Intervention and Security Forces (FNIS) used tear gas to disperse the crowd and struck some of the participants with their batons, but made no arrests. (Note: The FNIS fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, Decentralization and Public Security, and are not local police. Their responsibilities, however, include the protection of governmental facilities. End note.) This represents the first public demonstration against the current political situation since the July 5 rally, which drew thousands to Niamey's streets (ref A). The women then regrouped at the headquarters of an opposition political party, where they issued a statement.

Protesters Call for Reinstatement of Court, Mobilization

13. The FDD women's statement raised concern about "repeated violations of the August 9, 1999 Constitution by Mr. Tandja Mamadou, who decided not to respect Article 36 that obligates him to leave office at the end of his second term in December 2009." The women also denounced the "coup d'etat perpetrated by M. Tandja" and the "indoctrination of public media to the sole benefit of Tazarchists" (Note: a reference to supporters of an extension of the president's term of office. End note.) They demanded the reinstatement of the dissolved Constitutional Court. Further, they called on supporters of Niger's democracy to mobilize to defeat President Tandja's planned August 4 referendum for a new constitution and urged the international community to continue to disapprove of it.

Opposition Calls for "Active Boycott" of Referendum

¶4. The women's demonstration occurred at the same time as an opposition call for an "active boycott" of the referendum. On July 16, four anti-Tazarce umbrella groups, including the FDD, the Movement for the Defense of Democracy and the Republic (MDDR), the Front for Democracy and the Republic (FRD), and the Inter-Union of Niger's Workers (ITN) decided to create a larger coalition "to find the legal means to help Niger come out of the crisis created by President Tandja."

Newly Formed Opposition Coalition to "Intensify" Struggle

¶5. The new, yet unnamed, coalition issued a statement wherein it regarded all the measures taken by President Tandja under his newly assumed emergency powers as null and void, and demanded the reinstatement of the Constitutional Court dissolved on June 29. It also stated that the coalition would "intensify" its struggle against the referendum. The coalition invited all "sincere democrats and convinced patriots fully aware of the dangers of instability to mobilize to respond to any watchword it may issue." The signatories of the statement urged President Tandja to "immediately engage in constructive dialogue" to end the difficult situation in which Niger finds itself. Failing that, the coalition said it would hold President Tandja responsible for any "drifts" that may occur, and called on national and international public opinion as witnesses.

Judges Union Calls for Reinstatement, Respect for Court

¶6. Also on July 16, the Syndicat Autonome des Magistrats du Niger (SAMAN), Niger's largest judges' union, issued a statement requesting "respect for court decisions" and the reinstatement of the "illegally dissolved Constitutional Court." SAMAN called on the

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international community to acknowledge the "legal inexistence" of the court established on July 2 (ref B) and the forcible execution of all powers (executive, legislative, and judiciary) by the President of the Republic alone.

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